

THE SCHOOL FOR *Girls*

KORTCHA, ALBANIA



PARASKEVI KYRIAS



COVER PHOTO:
The Teachers of the Kortcha School

Upper Row, Left to Right:
Miss Eftimova, Miss Paraskevi Kyrias, Miss Petro, Miss Janaqis

Lower Row, Left to Right:
Phineas & Violet Kennedy, Kristo & Sevasti (Kyrias) Dako

THE SCHOOL FOR GIRLS
KORTCHA, ALBANIA

MISS PARASKEVI D. KYRIAS

with a preface by Dana Stucky

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THE KORTCHA GIRLS' SCHOOL

PREFACE

Few women have undertaken what Paraskevi D. Kyrias (Parashqevi D. Qiriazi) achieved in her lifespan. In 1880, the tenth and youngest child of Dhimitri and Maria was born in the vilayet of Monastir, Macedonia, in the Ottoman Empire. As a child she learned to speak five languages and as a young woman she mastered two more. Although small in stature, she was formidable in influence. After her graduation in 1904 from the prominent American College for Girls in Constantinople, where she served as president of the student government in her senior year, she was appointed acting principal and a teacher of the first Albanian girls' school from 1904-1905 and again in 1910-1911 while her sister Sevasti Kyrias was away. In 1907-1908, Paraskevi was the translator and language teacher for the newly arrived missionary Mr. Phineas B. Kennedy, sent from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions at the request of the school.

In 1908, as a delegate of the Girls' School to the momentous Alphabet Congress of Monastir, Paraskevi was appointed secretary for the eleven prestigious men selected to settle the Albanian alphabet question. Thereafter, she wrote the 1909 grammar book (*Abetare*) according to the newly chosen Albanian script. She is renowned, along with her sister, for the emancipation of Albanian women and for her key role in organizing the first women's society—*Yll' i Mëngjesit* (Morning Star)—in 1912 in the city of Kortcha. In 1913, she gained a master's degree in education from Oberlin College in Ohio. Her

thesis prescribed a national educational system for Albania in their newfound freedom.

Following the Balkan Wars and at the outburst of World War I, she fled for her life (as did many), moving to Bucharest in 1914 and on to the United States in 1915. In Boston, she devoted her life to the liberation of her nation and to the emancipation of women, as founder and editor of an American-based Albanian magazine (also called *Yll' i Mëngjesit*) from 1917-1920. In 1919, she sailed to Paris as the only Albanian woman diplomat at the Versailles Peace Conference, representing The Albanian National Party of America. Despite powerful campaigns to divide Albania amongst its neighbors, the conference generally affirmed Albania's borders as they had been drawn in 1913 at the London Peace Conference.

Early in the 1920s, Paraskevi returned to Albania with her brother-in-law and sister, Kristo and Sevasti Kyrias Dako, to continue to educate girls. Their newly formed Kyrias Girls' Institute near Tirana would provide necessary teachers for many of Albania's new schools. The relatively unknown life of this valiant patriot, Paraskevi Kyrias, merits further historical research and biographical writings.

In this reprint of her booklet published approximately 100 years ago, we hear Paraskevi in her own words recounting the founding of the Kortcha Girls' School, the experiences of the eager students, the dearth of textbooks, their dismal living conditions, their dire need to purchase land, their hopes for Albania's future, and their expectation for "unprecedented opportunities ... for the extension of the Kingdom of God."

DANA STUCKY, 2014

Little Albania, so much in the limelight just now, has always played an important part in Turkish affairs. The story told in the following pages speaks eloquently of the ability and noble characteristics of the Albanian people, as well as of their need. The Kyrias family are themselves fruits of our mission work in Turkey, and are no small contribution made by Albania to the solution of the problems in the Near East. –Editor, ca. 1913

BEGINNINGS

Twenty-two years ago, my late brother, Gerasim D. Kyrias, after graduating from the American Collegiate Institute of Samokov, Bulgaria, went to Kortcha, where he preached the gospel of our Lord for the first time in the vernacular, in the presence of many, both Moslem and Christian Albanians. Right after his first service, all the Moslem and Christian Albanians congratulated and begged him to stay permanently at Kortcha to start a real and systematic Christian work among his nation. Encouraged by these hearty invitations, he made an appeal to his American and English friends for some help, which did not delay to come, and so he founded the first Albanian girls' school. His sister, Miss Sevasti Kyrias, now Mrs. Dako, had just been graduated from the American College for Girls at Constantinople, so he asked her to come and assist him. The school was started and supported by the help of the Bible Lands Missions Aid Society, which still continues to contribute to its support.

In 1884, Mr. Gerasim Kyrias was captured by brigands, and, during a six months' cruel captivity, learned from experience the miseries under which his nation groaned. He was ransomed at a high sum, and then resumed his labors with energy and success. At the same time, the agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the late Dr. Alexander Thomson, of Constantinople, had come in touch with some Albanians and had been so impressed with them that a desire was awakened in his heart to find some means of helping this people. After a short correspondence between Dr. Thomson and Mr. Kyrias, it was arranged that the latter become a sub-agent of the Bible Society, making his

headquarters in Kortcha, Albania. No missionaries having yet entered the field, it was understood between these two earnest, consecrated men that aside from mere selling of the Scriptures, Mr. Kyrias was to preach the Gospel. The six months experience in the hands of brigands in the mountains of Albania had ruined his health, and soon his life was ended and the work left in the hands of his sister. After the death of Mr. Kyrias, in January, 1894, the American Board assumed the support of the school and also a native preacher.

IN SPITE OF PERSECUTIONS

My sister continued the school for nineteen years, in spite of all persecutions, which came, both from the Greek Church and the Turkish Government. The persecutions against her and her work



AN ALBANIAN GENTLEMAN

have been many; but, instead of shaking her, have made her stronger. The enemies of her work seeing that their persecutions did not affect her work, they made plans to take her life, but a friend of hers, a neighbor of the school, became aware of it and warned her to be careful. For some time she did not leave the house.

In spite of all this, the school grew. We, seeing the need, made repeated appeals to the American Board to send us some good missionaries to help us to enlarge the work. We needed also the foreign protection, which would enable us to stand against the Turkish Government's threats of closing the school.

In the fall of 1907, the Board sent us as missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy, who were kept in Salonica by the Turkish officials

for about four months and did not reach Kortcha until the spring of 1908. Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy are most earnest and zealous in their work. They try their best to help the people, both by living and doing.

UNDER THE YOUNG TURKS

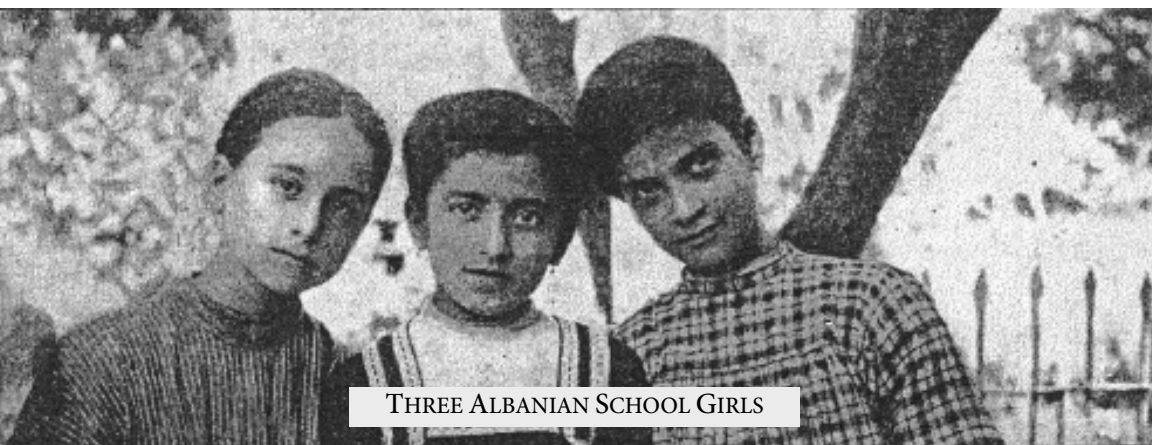
The first year of the Constitutional Government of Turkey (1908), when the young Turks needed the assistance of the Albanians, they did not make any opposition against our school, and so in this year we had the largest number of students among whom there were a good many Moslems. In 1909, the young Turks changed their policy toward the Albanians and sent against them a powerful army, under the command of the famous—for his cruelties—Torgout Pasha, who proclaimed court-martials in all the cities and towns of our country, closing all the Albanian educational institutions, stopping all the papers, closing all the printing presses and beating to death all those that were in favor of the national education. This year was a critical year for the school, too, because serious attempts were made by the young Turks to close it, but thank God, they did not succeed.

The year of 1910 was a year of great changes. Miss Sevasti Kyrias married Mr. Dako and so the school lost not only a teacher, but its very life.

INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT

The mission asked me to take her place, and during these two years I have seen better under what difficult conditions my sister struggled for nineteen years. Teaching is not easy under good conditions and with proper conveniences, but to teach without text books and in classrooms where the rays of the sun never penetrate—not only to you, but even to us who have experienced it, it seems impossible.

Our school building is not what you or we would like it to be. It is inconvenient and small and has almost no yard for playground. What there is of it is surrounded by high walls and in the midst is one large tree. We have no sick-room nor bathroom, and the difficulties arising from the lack of these two essential things are beyond description. Last year we had two serious cases of illness.



THREE ALBANIAN SCHOOL GIRLS

My room, which I shared with one of the teachers, Miss Eftimova, was turned into a hospital. Not only during the day had I to be after the sick, to give them their medicine on time, but very often, during the night, when they were restless, and had pains, I had to get up, if it was winter, build a fire for them, and help them as much as I, in my ignorance, could.

Our dining room is a small room with no place for a stove, so in cold weather we must have our heavy coats on and try to eat as fast as we can and then run away. Sometimes, I preferred to go without a dinner rather than go into the cold dining room.

We have no library, and it is so sad to see our girls, especially on Sundays, going about idly here and there, desiring so much to have something to read. It breaks our hearts not to be able to supply them. Since we came to this country we often have spoken to our friends about the great need of a library, and a friend (Mr. E. B. Stiles) in Manchester, Iowa, presented us a copy of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and another friend (Mr. I. W. Metcalf) in Oberlin, Ohio, a copy of *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. We are more than grateful to them for their generous gifts.

But let us come out into the yard. Our yard, as all our other "unaccommodations," is very small, and surrounded by high walls. We have felt great need of some playground, for the narrow quarters don't allow the poor students to get the right kind of recreation. Every time I called the doctor to see some sick girl, I was told that the surroundings did not help at all the girls to keep well and strong, or the sick girls to improve.

In spite of all this, we have a great deal to be thankful for. Many epidemic diseases have been in the city, such as scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid fever, etc., but they never entered our walls.

I wish to speak here a little about our girls. It was surprising to me and to the rest of our teachers how enthusiastic they were to learn. I assure you that very often my patience was tried, when I used to handle the old used-up-for-years manuscripts, used in the place of text-books. When my girls came to my classes, they often failed to know their lessons, but how could I blame them? Did I give them proper textbooks, and they did not learn their lessons? The dear girls did their best, never complaining, so long as they could learn something. The mathematics teacher, Miss Eftimova told me one day how deeply impressed she was when she saw her class run for their lesson in a dark room, which was never penetrated by any rays of the sun. Miss Eftimova is a dear friend of Mrs. Dako and has been in the work continually for twenty years. Being all tired out, she is now taking a year's rest at her home in Monastir. She has been one of the most faithful workers and we do hope that after this year's rest she will be able to take up again the work which she loves so much.

FAR REACHING INFLUENCE

The influence of our school has been of the highest type, not only in Kortcha, but all over Albania. Moslem and Christian Albanians from all over the country have often desired to send their daughters to our school, but, I am sorry to say, we had very often to refuse their requests because of lack of room. One of our best physicians, Dr. S. Bilbily, a graduate of Paris University, often delights in speaking of the girls that come to our school, as he sees them in all homes that he visits. He, as well as everybody, admires their behavior and their character. Although we have not had any converts¹ to join the Protestant community, we all believe that there has been a great change in the lives of our students. To this, not only we and their parents, but even the enemies of our work, testify.

¹ The author is likely referring to the absence of student converts from the school endeavor (*publisher's note*, 2014).

Last April, you may have read in your papers of the visit of the Minister of the Interior in Albania, who was accompanied by Mr. Graves and the French Colonel Foulon. The latter two visited our school and were astonished to see what our students do under such circumstances, and were surprised that our school, under such unfavorable conditions, could have such a good reputation throughout the country. Our last closing exercises, which were held on the 14th of June, 1912, were very successful, and pleased everybody present. The hall was crowded with the leaders of the city. The Governor, who was present, stayed to the end, and then he made the following remark: "I have been present in many schools and gatherings, but nowhere have I seen what I have seen and heard here today. I congratulate both teachers and students for their success; I congratulate also the parents who are privileged to send their daughters to this school."

MORE FRIENDS NEEDED

I wish to express here our deep gratitude to the W. B. M. I. (Women's Board of Missions of the Interior), the supporter of our school, which has done and is still doing so much towards the enlightenment of our nation. I also wish to thank Miss E. M. Stone, who has been a great friend and helper of our school in many ways. She has always worked to raise money for that work and during these last years she has raised a sum for the enlargement of the school building. Another great friend of our work, of whom I wish to make mention, is Mrs. Marie M. Hall of Jamestown, N.Y., for her most generous gift of \$500 for printing some of Mr. Dako's textbooks, on which he has been working for more than ten years. The question of the Albanian textbooks, according to our opinion, is as important as the question of a building. Mr. Dako's plan is to start a permanent fund through the income of the books already printed and through any further help that he might get from other sources, to print not only his own and Mrs. Dako's textbooks, but any necessary books for our school.

I wish to express here also our great gratitude to Mr. C. R. Crane, of Chicago, for the great help he is so kindly rendering to our girls' school and to Albania. Mr. Crane travelled with Mr. Dako

through Albania in the spring of 1911, and, seeing that the greatest need of the Albanian nation, at the present time is education, asked Mr. Dako to choose six Albanian boys and six Albanian girls and send them to the American colleges of Constantinople. Since we came to this country, Mr. Crane has promised \$5,000 for the buying of a lot for our girls' school.

A FORWARD LOOK

The nation looks to us for nearly everything. Last May, the treasurer of the Albanian National Board of Education asked Mr. Dako to organize a committee for writing textbooks for the national schools, in which our workers were to be largely represented. The future seems to offer us even greater field for work than in the past. One outcome of the Balkan war is that the Albanians have proclaimed their independence, and we do hope that the great powers will acknowledge it in due time. If so, unprecedented opportunities will be before us for the extension of the Kingdom of God. The only question is, will we be able to meet these opportunities?

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